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SENTIMENTS

OF

A P A R T Y M A N

ON THE

STATE OF PARTIES.

AC 30. 1812. S 46

S. GOSNELL, Printer, Little Queen Street, London.

SENTIMENTS,

&c.

IT is a mortifying consideration, that, when speaking of the period when our constitution was in its greatest perfection, we must say, like a fairy tale, Once upon a time such and such things were; for though some seem to think that the prevalence of luxury, the profits of commerce, and the rapid march of our manufactures, during the last twenty years, prove the exaltation of our political liberty beyond all former times, such an opinion cannot for a moment stand the scrutiny of any man's reason, however little discriminating. The general security and freedom of the subject may remain entire long after the foundations on which they rest show signs

of decay—the power of a nation may be conspicuous, when the causes which produced it are ceasing to operate. Was not the Roman an unfettered citizen and a victorious soldier, when the institutions which made him so were visibly on the decline?

But for our satisfaction in this point, let any one, bearing in mind (which I need hardly call upon him to do) the present state of parties, look back to the reigns of the two first kings of the House of Brunswick.—He will there find, that monarchs, not blessed, or rather cursed, with those extraordinary abilities which make the production of one age the wonder of all, gave their people happiness at home, and glory abroad, solely by paying a due reverence to the principles of our form of government. Law was maintained, though a Pretender claimed the throne, and men of the greatest abilities were called to ex-

ecute the King's will, which was, to increase the prosperity of his subjects.

At that time the prevailing party was the Whigs. Although it was not their practice to side always with the King, they knew the prerogative legally allowed to him, and were forward to maintain it undiminished. Although it was not their boasted cry to attend solely to the people, they venerated their rights, and were careful to preserve them from encroachment or oblivion. Their bias indeed was on the popular side. Not that they were ready to plead for every measure popularly demanded, but to inquire into every discontent, and seek means to alleviate it. Their intimate acquaintance with the history, and a perpetual commentary on the political events, of our country, enabled them, with far surer aim than the distant or inattentive could obtain, to frame specific laws for relieving grievances and confirming pri-

vileges. Their discretion ever regarded the hearts of the people, and the people's affections ever confided in their wisdom. Born to commanding property, and aided by aspiring talents, they formed a natural link between the monarchy and democracy of the state; they made the will of the King powerful in execution, and of the people effective in deliberation; swayed by all the circumstances of the times, they were bent from the path of rectitude by none. No wonder that the Crown was potent, and the people satisfied; each proceeded gloriously in its own path, adorning and honouring, never disturbing the other. These were the consequences of Whig principles, brought upon the stage by men of high, but purified ambition. Of the new system that was formed to supersede the one which I have been describing, a correct and eloquent description has been given by Mr. Burke, in his

pamphlet called “Thoughts on the Causes of the present Discontents.” It should be read at the present time still more for its truth than for its powerful writing.

The system was founded on a principle certainly untried since the Revolution, and proceeded by a method entirely new. The design was, to raise the personal greatness of the King, and through him of the authors of the system; and it was to be effected by a party ever on the alert to signify his will in Parliament, and to second his arbitrary changes of administration. But such a plan could never have succeeded, unless it had been approved by a considerable body among the people at large; and unfortunately it was so approved by many disinterested persons in all ranks of life. For this several reasons may be given. There is a passion in mankind for the persons of men high in authority, which has been much remarked,

and traced to its source by a great writer on morals. To the zealous sensibility for princes is transferred all care for the continuance of the government, all that desire for the support of order and preservation of property, so natural and praiseworthy in the members of a civilized society. The whole mixture forms what is often called Loyalty. Now, there is nothing more dignified in man than this quality, if really genuine : like true piety, it ennobles the creature in whose breast it is found ; but, like piety also, it is often confounded with unmeaning admiration, and a contemptible dread of power, whilst a name (the only thing they have in common) preserves a respect to the counterfeit as well as the reality, and abuses the consecrated temple as a sanctuary for the ungovernable passion of servility.

Another reason is to be found where we might least expect it, in the increasing

knowledge of our people. The English Constitution, neither faultless in theory, nor perfect in practice; is probably the best ever formed. But a knowledge of it is not to be acquired from the hearsay of its acts, and much less from the refined treatises which have been written on the subject. It is a very complicated machine, not to be understood from encyclopædical descriptions, but only by continual observations on the movement of the wheels, and the purpose of the various contrivances. When tried by any theoretical standard, it has always been found defective, for this reason—that the theory adopted is not a just one. For instance: Mr. Locke having laid down equal representation as the principle on which the House of Commons is composed, immediately goes on to complain of the borough of Old Sarum*, just as we do now. No wonder that the

* *Essay on Government, Part II.*

great mass of our population, who have begun to think during the present reign, observing parties at a distance, and trying them by these simple theories, should find a strange disagreement between their notions of political good, and the parliamentary method of pursuing it. The Whig leaders were consequently abandoned; some bold hearts sought perfection in Republicanism; but by far the greater part, mixing an old prejudice with a new illumination, called out for the King and the People, and, by opposing their natural advocates, added to the real strength of their opponents.

Thus then, of the numbers admitted to the political spectacle, many have obeyed the vulgar passion for royal pomp and circumstance, the playthings and toys of the mature and majestic intellect; others have gone aside in search of a cloud on a hill, which they mistook for the temple of Li-

berty ; and a very small portion have had the wisdom to confide in the old parties of the state.

In these observations on the temper of the country, I have endeavoured to give a short account of the fact ; and I shall aim at the same object in what I am about to say of the sovereign power.

George Prince of Wales seems born to show in a new point of view how vulnerable human nature is to the temptation of elevated rank and extended rule. With a large portion of natural talents, and an open disposition, destiny has allotted him what seems to be a new gift, but is in fact a most malicious present—the rank of Heir Apparent to the Crown, and the dignity of Regent of this kingdom. The first led him into dissipations against which youth and good-humour could offer no guard ; but as long as his judgment could remain unbiased on political questions, he main-

tained the most constitutional principles, and a friendship with the greatest of their advocates. And to make still more notorious his attachment to both, he announced to a number of persons at Brighton, on his own birth-day, two years ago, his intention to educate his daughter in the same opinions, and the same reverence to Mr. Fox, which he himself had entertained and ever would entertain. This voluntary speech was nearly the last act of a free man. In the spring of 1811 he was made Regent, and with the proper spirit of a governor of England, took the advice of others upon his conduct; and from this time he has fallen into the magic circle which was drawn round his father. Private and secret advisers have formed themselves into the constant and sole supporters of his authority. Thus surrounded by friends, he has made every man his enemy; deceived by an intriguing party, he sees but

a small and imperfect image of public affairs ; he mistakes an olive-branch for a dagger ; and hastens to a precipice, to avoid the aid which is held out to him. But to cut short the metaphor, the effects of friendly counsels have been most lamentable : he who proclaimed his adherence to the principles of Fox, has confided his government to the minions of Pitt, and has indeed tacitly approved of the whole system of that statesman. I beg his pardon —there is one exception ; it is on the propriety of extending religious liberty to the Roman Catholics, in which alone his great opponent, Mr. Fox, agreed with him. Henry the Fourth changed his religious belief, that the great majority of his people might be at peace : George the Fourth, that will be, has changed his political creed. But where is the consequence ? Are religious sects appeased, or the manufac-

turers happy? Is the nation dazzled by glory, awed by firmness *, or lulled by excessive prosperity?

From such a source sprang the offers to Lords Grey and Grenville at the expiration of the Regency restrictions, and more recently through Lord Wellesley and Lord Moira. The details of these overtures have been sufficiently made known by the

* Cardinal de Retz more than once accuses Mazarin of bringing the government into contempt, which he says is “la maladie la plus dangereuse d'un état et dont la contagion se repand le plus aisément et le plus promptement du chef dans les membres.” And this was not the fault of the governor, but the adviser, whose character is curious: “Il promit tout parce qu'il ne voulut rien tenir. Il ne fut ni doux ni cruel parce qu'il ne se souvenoit ni des bienfaits ni des injures. Il s'aimoit trop, ce qui est le naturel des ames laches: il se craignoit trop peu, se qui est le caractère de ceux qui n'ont pas le soin de leur réputation. Il prévoyoit assez bien le mal, parce qu'il avoit souvent peur; mais il n'y remédiait pas à proportion, parce qu'il n'avoit pas tant de prudence que de peur. Il avoit de l'esprit, d'insinuation, de l'enjouement, des manières; mais le vilain cœur paroissoit toujours à travers, &c.”—*Mem. de Retz.*

persons best qualified to discuss them, and the result in most minds must be, that the whole was the developement of a plan laid somewhere to induce the Prince Regent to make inadmissible proposals to the Opposition, offering them either places at a *table d'hôte* Administration, or the unrestricted exercise of power in an Administration, with the projector of which they were not agreed in political opinion.

But I find, that in order to pourtray truly the present state of the country, it is necessary to go farther into this affair.

The House of Commons having waited till there were collected in the Cabinet as many bodies and as many souls as usually constitute an Administration, addressed the Regent to form a strong and efficient government. After some delay Lord Wellesley received powers to form one. He made proposals to Lords Grey and Grenville, which were not accepted; and in-

deed it would be a miracle, or corruption, if two parties, on negotiating together (especially when every thing said is written, and every thing written published), should instantaneously agree. But before an explanation could take place, the powers were withdrawn from Lord Wellesley, and given to Lord Moira, a person known by all his friends to be eager for the continuance of the Household; and on this point he broke off with the two Lords. On this part two facts are proper to be remarked: first, that the Prince Regent demanded no pledge, nor any unconstitutional concession of the Whig leaders: second, that the Whig leaders asked nothing of the Prince Regent; they consulted with the Noble Earl appointed to form the Administration on the propriety of removing the great officers of the Household, and differed with him on that point of policy. The question on the one side

was, whether as Ministers they could expect to carry the great measures they desired with the influence of the Household unconnected with or hostile to them? And on the other, whether in this peculiar case the immediate dismissal of the officers of the Household would not give strength to the calumnies which had been uttered on them and on the Prince, and thereby exhibit the weakness, and lower the dignity, of the Crown itself?

We have nothing to do with discussing these questions; our inquiry concerns the state of Administration now; and with regard to it we have further to state, that the Household afterwards declared that they had requested permission to resign, upon the appointment of Lord Grey and Lord Grenville; and it was said to have been the pleasure of the Prince Regent to have accepted of their resigna-

them to view the appalling spectacle of the Sovereign and the Parliament bent to the desires of a secret and unconstitutional influence. As to the Administration, its unequalled weakness is the sign, as it is the triumph and the security, of the persons who conduct that influence. The Regency, indeed, betrays its parentage ; it sprang from the phantom of kingly power, it exhibits the *manes* of responsible advisers. Their outset shows that all their acts shall receive the stamp of the opinions their adversaries entertain. The ship of state is driven at the mercy of the storm of opposition, and is nearly shaken to pieces by the jarring of its own timbers. The First Lord of the Treasury is a constant opponent of Catholic emancipation, but Government consents that it shall be carried. The Minister for Foreign Affairs means immediately to suspend the Orders in Council ; but he has no sooner

recovered the terrors of an attack from Opposition, than he has to encounter a contradiction from his own colleagues, and presently after the official document contradicts both. In short, we have ministers without measures, and government without rule. The most searching of its examiners in vain tries to discover its line of policy ; the most obsequious of its followers is astonished at its compliance. A coalition of the parties in the Cabinet is highly desirable ; though perhaps in one way they are very firm—like the pyramids, they are stronger as you go downwards. On the highest measures of all they have no opinion ; on inferior points they take the opinion of their enemies ; but on the lowest question of patronage or place they show immoveable determination.

If their inefficiency was at all in question ; if there was any doubt whether collected sand could make a compact stone ;

if the Administration, which fled from office under Lord Sidmouth, and after the death of Mr. Pitt could in any sense be said to be still untried, surely they have now been tried on the charge of incompetency, and have proved themselves guilty to the satisfaction of the country.

The existence of such an Administration, at a time when the difficulty of the public situation instantly unveils the character of statesmen, proves the weight of undue influence, both upon the mind of the Prince and of the Parliament. But let me take this occasion to declare, that, in protesting against such influence, I would not be understood to join in the scandal against a person, or a family, supposed to direct it. Such attacks are ungenerous, as they betray a desire to tyrannize over His Royal Highness in the choice of his private society, and to condemn an individual convicted of no crime but that of belonging

to a defenceless sex. They are ill-judged, as they are directed against those who would have been powerless, without the concurrence of a party, which would at all events have been formidable. This party, having united honest prejudice with corrupt impartiality, and caught in the same net virtuous error and pensioned sycophancy, at a time when errors are numerous and pensions abundant, it is no wonder the Crown should look to it with confidence, and the people with alarm. The remedy which seems to me the safest is a sincere co-operation with the party called the Opposition. But here again I meet with the party who have taken a more democratic view of our politics. This party has leaders, and to their singular advantage they have reliance on those leaders. They are told by them that the Whigs have deserted the people; that for all their evils, Parliamentary Reform is

a safe, pleasant, and infallible remedy; and that all statesmen who do not support it are corrupt. I ask the reader's patience to allow me a few words on all these points.

It is difficult to show what principle of the old Whigs the present have deserted; nor is it very easy to point out which their accusers have retained. If a constant anxiety to preserve the rights of the people undiminished, a careful attention to inquire into the expenditure, and restrain the abuse of public money; a solicitude for the prosperity of our trade and commerce, and a manly determination to withstand encroachment on the part of the Crown;—if these feelings be not totally repugnant to Whiggism, we have still much of it left amongst us. If the people imagine vain things at the instigation of vain men, the Whigs can only endeavour (perhaps they have not

enough endeavoured) to draw them from their delusion.

Though a friend to Parliamentary Reform, I should wish to haul down the false colours under which it has appeared. It is recommended, as a way to restore the House of Commons to the true basis of equal representation, to assure the complete independence of Parliament, and to destroy corruption.

Equal representation has never yet been the plan of our House of Commons. The complaint of Mr. Locke has been already alluded to. But to attain the object, as it has been often argued, we must give a vote, not only to all copyholders, but to every woman and child in His Majesty's dominions. Any step on this ground, either partial or complete, would entirely alter the principle of our constitution, perhaps very much for the better; but, considering how many attempts have failed,

how many beautiful plans have melted at the touch, is it for the people of England of all others to make the experiment?—

• The same observation is nearly applicable to the independence of Parliament. The more narrowly we look into it, shall we find reason to agree with the conclusion of Mr. Hume, that some kind and some degree of influence is inseparable from the nature of our free constitution *. The contrary opinion has partly arisen from the simile of a balance, which is quite false when applied to our Parliament. Its principle of union is combination, rather than opposition; an exertion of skill, rather than of power. But even were the attempt to be made at this time, when the Crown is so powerful in the country, the object of independence would scarcely be gained.

To destroy corruption is rather more

* *Essay on the Independence of Parliament.*

difficult than to overturn a government. It is a feature in political institutions coeval with the contract, but becomes weaker as the society grows more refined. Accordingly it prevails more in the lower orders than the higher.—Will Sir Francis Burdett, after the experience of the election of Middlesex, declare, that bribery will be abolished when the boroughs are extinguished?

If the few preceding observations have any justice, the people are cheated when they are told that the Rights of Man, the Independency of Parliament, and the Purity of Election, are all involved in a Reform of Parliament. But as a means of causing the voice of the people to be more distinctly heard in the House of Commons, and their grievances more immediately examined; as a measure for diminishing the influence of the Crown, and a satisfaction to the nation's wishes, the

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Whig leaders, namely, Lord Grey and Mr. Ponsonby, openly support it. If they should be less vehement in their demand, less positive in their decisions, and less sanguine in their expectations than some amongst the people, it may be candid to recollect, that whilst they have been through life engaged in the cause of the people—the losing cause—they have seen somewhat of the actual government of the world ; and it is perhaps natural that they should not be quite so eager as the young, nor quite so peremptory as the ignorant. But since the Whig leaders, acting upon their own knowledge, have not adopted all the prescriptions which are sent from Cornwall and Caithness, from retail shops in the city, and public houses in the country, an unreasonable distrust has succeeded to an honourable confidence ; all party is said to be a trick ; the House of Commons to consist but of venal candidates for place,

and a change of Administration to be only the triumph of interested individuals.— To my mind, nothing can be more unjust than these accusations. The persons accused are men of the highest rank and the greatest stake in the kingdom; descended from those who in different periods have attested their zeal for liberty, they have themselves repeatedly declined the fullness of power on grounds of the most general and public nature. If any charge can be fixed upon them, it is, that they are ambitious of effective influence in the government, in order to carry the measures they think best for the nation.— If any one think this corruption, I should be sorry to agree with him; for I must consequently allow that the Revolution was a job, and the Protestant Settlement a struggle for emolument. There is no cry more senseless, or more immoral, than that against the corruption of politicians:

it is founded in mistake, or springs from envious passions. For the last twenty years, the most respectable characters in the kingdom have been engaged in politics, and (with one or two exceptions) all statesmen have been rigidly pure and austere honest. But it pleases those who have no birth, to exclaim against Aristocracy ; those who have no talents, against upstarts ; and those who have neither, against parties and pre-eminence in the gross. But what is the conduct of the disinterested reformers ? They detest party, but form political associations ; they disdain power, but are, above all others, desirous to embody into law the wildest fantasy of their sovereign imaginations. The two parties against which I have been speaking often agree in language, and sometimes in object. The party which bows to a royal idol, is ready to gratify many popular prejudices ; and that which

adores a multitudinous deity, often exalts the dignity and honour of the Crown. They have one object:—to sweep away the odious Aristocracy, or middle ranks between the throne and the people. But a monarchy without a due scale of rank amongst its subjects, can never be limited; a people that levels its immediate superiors, must level the highest, to the destruction of all respect for authority, or lie prostrate at its disposal, to the extinction of all reverence for freedom. Thus the measures of the one party would immediately produce Despotism, the others would come to the same end indirectly through the medium of Anarchy. Both are blinded: the followers of Royalty are worked upon by passion; the proselytes of Democracy are led away by imagination. These injure the Sovereign by speaking of his interest as separate from that of the nation; those insult the people

by giving its name to every mob that disturbs the justice of the community*. The friends of the Royal Family and the friends of the People are, in fine, determined upon one end:—to sacrifice those to whom the House of Brunswick owes its Crown, and the nation its Bill of Rights.

Those who respect either will be anxious to avoid even the suspicion of joining the upstart parties of the present reign. The strong sense of this people will soon learn to distrust equally those who suck their blood, and those who pamper them to make better food of them hereafter. Let them repose their wishes upon the Whigs,

* Let us remark that this was the case in the reign of Charles the First, when all the courtiers spoke of the King as accountable only to God, and the Parliament protected the mob that attended at Westminster on Strafford's trial. Neither of them perceived that there was nothing so dangerous to monarchy as exorbitant pretension, nothing so contrary to freedom as illegal force,

who in every former crisis have obtained and deserved it. A party, consisting of the most respectable Peers, and gentlemen of property in the House of Commons, seconded by the sounder part of the country, must succeed in overthrowing an influence introduced by stealth, and promoted by encouraging disunion. England has no reason for despair; the greater share of her population is still uncorrupted, but part is misled by artifice, and part disgusted by misrepresentation. Let jealousy subside, and calumny must be silent; let none be neuter, and all will be safe. It is ridiculous to speak of the present Administration carrying through measures which they have always opposed. America cannot be conciliated but by those who have treated her in a conciliatory manner. The Roman Catholics of Ireland cannot be firmly united to the empire but by the friends to their welfare.

and their cause; and above all, the abuses of Crown influence, and of public money, cannot be checked but by those who are anxious for reform. But it is wicked to say that any Administration can make provisions cheap, and lighten our burdens. The people of this country loudly approved of the last and the present wars. Now all amusements are expensive, and this popular entertainment is the most so of all. And at the present time the Spanish Revolution has made it absolutely necessary, for our honour, to continue the contest. Yet there can be little doubt, that if commerce is freely permitted, if the Bank is carefully restrained, and taxes are judiciously chosen, we shall still have money to spare for many years to come.

THE END.

